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Ex-Iranian Official Says 3 at Bell Knew Of Khatemi's Role

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TEHERAN, Iran, March 2—A former Iranian official who once promoted Bell Helicopter interests here said yesterday that a decade ago he had told three Bell executives that the chief of Iran's air force had a secret interest in Air Taxi, a company that Bell paid \$2.9 million when it won a lucrative contract from the Iranian Government.

Suggestions that the payment was improper have delayed the confirmation of G. William Miller as chairman of the Federal Reserve Board and have led to a formal Securities and Exchange Commission investigation of Bell's parent company, Textron Inc., which Mr. Miller headed.

Testimony Unchallenged

Hassan Safavi, a 66-year-old lawyer and economist who has served in several Iranian Government posts, said in an interview that he told three Bell executives when they came to Teheran in 1967 that Gen. Mohammad Khatemi maintained a hidden interest in Air Taxi even though the Shah had instructed Government officials to end all business involvement.

Dr. Safavi said nothing in the interview, however, that challenged or contradicted Mr. Miller's repeated testimony that he personally had no knowledge of any ownership interest by General Khatemi.

Dr. Safavi said that the three executives—J. H. Orpen, Richard Pierrot and George Kling—went to see General Khatemi and that when they returned to the United States, Bell appointed Air Taxi as its sole agent in Iran.

"When I heard about that I went to General Khatemi—he was my friend—and complained because I had spent quite a bit of my own money to promote the sale for Bell," Dr. Safavi said. "He told me not to worry, that he would pay me something from his share. Four years ago he gave me an amount, enough to cover my losses, and he arranged for me to serve as a consultant for Air Taxi."

Bell Helicopter, a subsidiary of Textron, paid Air Taxi \$2.9 million in 1973 at about the time Bell received a \$501 million contract to deliver 489 helicopters to the Iranian Army.

First Word From Iran

Dr. Safavi's statement in the interview is the first assertion from anyone in Iran with direct knowledge that General Khatemi was a secret owner of Air Taxi and that some Bell executives were aware of that when their company made the \$2.9 payment to it.

Mr. Miller, Textron's chairman, said in his testimony before the Senate Banking Committee that the payment to Air Taxi represented straightforward compensation for past services and the settlement of any future claims. He has steadfastly maintained that he had no knowledge of any relationship between Air Taxi and General Khatemi, a brother-in-law of the Shah. General Khatemi died in a glider accident in 1975.

In testimony before the Senate Banking Committee, Dwayne Jose, Bell's vice president for commercial marketing, stated Monday that he had sent Mr. Orpen, Bell's international marketing manager until 1969, and two others to Iran in the fall of 1967 to determine whether there would be any "conflict-of-interest" in Bell's retaining Air Taxi as its agent.

Mr. Jose said that he had not believed the "fairly tale" Bell's former agent had told about the relationship between General Khatemi and Air Taxi. "All I recall is my feeling that we wanted to make certain that we would not entertain a dealer arrangement that involved any conflict of interest," Mr. Jose told the panel.

Mr. Jose said that when the team returned there was "no doubt in his mind" that there was any conflict.

Mr. Orpen also appeared before the committee and told the panel that he had heard only head "allegations and rumors" about General Khatemi's interest in Air Taxi before he left for Iran. Mr. Orpen acknowledged meeting General Khatemi briefly, but described it as a "social visit," except for a short discussion of Bell's interest in selling Iran helicopters.

Mr. Orpen could not be reached for comment on Dr. Safavi's contention that the Bell executive was told of the Khatemi interest. Robert S. Eisenhower, a Textron spokesman, said today that the Safavi account "seems to be roughly the same kind of information in the same time frame" that the Senate hearings covered. He declined to comment further.

Of Mr. Orpen's two colleagues, Mr. Pierrot has since died, and Mr. Kling's whereabouts are unknown.

In the interview, Dr. Safavi, who lives in a rambling apartment packed with precious antiques, paintings and silk Persian carpets, shed new light on the control of Air Taxi since it was founded in 1953.

He said the company was set up by three major partners—General Khatemi (who was married to the Shah's sister, Fatame), Ahmed Shafik and Nader Jahambani.

Directive in 1960's

In the early 1960's the Shah issued a directive that he did not want Government officials involved in business enterprises, Dr. Safavi recalled.

Although this was not a law legally compelling General Khatemi to divest himself of his Air Taxi stock, he felt that, as head of the Imperial Air Force, he should not be listed as a shareholder in the company, according to Dr. Safavi. Therefore, he said, General Khatemi had two friends—Amir Zanghani and Frederick Eshoo—list themselves as holders of shares that mostly belonged to the general.

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